2020 General Assembly Report

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It was an educational experience serving as your Teaching Elder Commissioner. Thank you for the opportunity. I included a summary of the actions of the GA later in this report. I also included in this report an excerpt from the book *Rage* written by Bob Woodward. I think it is important that we understand the opposition to Black Lives Matter.

The issue of racial inequality was front and center during the Assembly. There was attention given to the Poor People’s campaign. People were able to participate in the activity virtually.

During the plenary sessions it was evident how “white” our denomination is. There were numerous opportunities for the delegates to deal with racial inequality but did it in a way that came across as white privilege. For instance, a substitute motion on anti-racism was approved but it turned out that the committee’s affected were not consulted. It added more work to those committees without giving more resources. The committees were mandated to have a certain amount of racial-ethnic people on the committee and there are not that many.

I lift this approved measure that we can work on collectively. I Pastor a multicultural congregation in Jamestown and am willing to assist:

* **PC(USA) churches and presbyteries would approve antiracism policies.**

In September 2020, an African family that I know in Jamestown received a cowardly note in the mail that said “Blacks Not Wanted” Racism is real. I sense people do not understand the issue. That is one reason why I commend this excerpt from an interview with President Trump.

Excerpt from the book *Rage* written by Bob Woodward

B. W. – What, I asked, was he trying to accomplish in two speeches he had just given over the Fourth of July weekend, one at Mount Rushmore and the other at the White House?

 Both painted divisive portraits of some citizens threatening the country–a kind of reemergence in tone of “American carnage” from his inaugural address. As best I could tell, presidents of both parties universally gave unifying and inspiriting speeches on July 4—a freebie of goodwill. “In the Mount Rushmore speech you talk about a new far-left fascism,” I said. He had said there was “a merciless campaign to wipe out our history. Angry mobs are trying to tear down statues of our Founders.” and “this leftwing cultural revolution is designed to overthrow the American Revolution.”

 I said, “There’s some people who represent that kind of anger, the radical left. But it’s not much.”

 The next day, in the White House speech, Trump had said that like the American heroes who defeated the Nazis, “We are now in the process of defeating the radical left, the Marxists, the anarchist, the agitators, the looters.”

 I said they were no Marxists left.

Trump – “No Trump said, “that’s wrong, Bob. Black Lives Matter, what they do is they literally have it in their website that they’re Marxist.”

B. W. – One of the cofounders claimed in 2015 that she and other organizers of Black Lives Matter were “trained Marxists.” It was not, however, on their website. The Black Lives Matter phrase has been adopted as a reformist slogan by the broader social movement for racial justice.

“What are you saying to people?” I asked the president. “In the second speech you said ‘our movement’ referring to your movement and your base. ‘Never forget, we are one family and one nation.’”

“Right,” Trump said.

“Black Lives Matter people look at all of this and they say they’re not being invited in. That you’ve put up a wall around your base. And the question is, what’s your intent?”

He didn’t answer but said, “I have done more for the Black community than any other president other than Abraham Lincoln.”

I said that Lyndon Johnson certainly had done more. The passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was a monumental achievement. It outlawed discrimination based on race, religion or sex, further mandated the desegregation of schools, the prohibition of racial discrimination in employment and protections against the unequal application of requirements for voter registration.

“But it’s about the heart,” I said.

“I have done a tremendous amount for the Black community,” Trump said, “And honestly, I’m not feeling any love. As soon as the China virus came in—as soon as the plague, China virus, came in—as soon as it came in—those poll numbers all of a sudden started inching down “8 or 9 or 10 percent. And I don’t understand that. I don’t. Because nobody blames me for the virus.”

Summary of the 224th General Assembly (2020)

The historic 224th General Assembly (2020) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) took place over four days: June 19, 20, 26, and 27, 2020. The scaled-down assembly gathering was the first to be held totally online with commissioners and advisory delegates participating via Zoom, while the Stated Clerk, Co-Moderators, parliamentarians, and technical personnel worked out of the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

**STATED CLERK REELECTION**

The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, was reelected as Stated Clerk for another four-year term. Nelson was first elected to the post during the 222nd General Assembly (2016) in Portland, Oregon. He was unopposed in this last election. The Stated Clerk Nominating Committee said it was satisfied that Nelson sought to hear the young voices in the church at all levels. Nelson also expressed his desire to address climate change, support small churches, and work to remove barriers to marginalized communities becoming fully involved in the church.

**CO-MODERATORS OF THE 224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2020)**

Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart and the Reverend Gregory Bentley were elected on the first ballot as the Co-Moderators of the 224th General Assembly (2020). They will go down in church history as the first Co-Moderators/Moderators to moderate an online assembly. Due to church travel restrictions, the Co-Moderators plan to connect with presbyteries and churches across the denomination electronically with hopes of traveling on behalf of the church when restrictions are lifted.

**BUDGET**

Commissioners to the 224th General Assembly (2020) approved unified budgets of approximately $80.1 million for 2021 and $83.4 million in 2022, covering the work of the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and the Administrative Services Group. In addition, commissioners authorized the two boards and one committee that oversee the work of each agency to make decisions over the next two years on each agency’s budgets due to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Any amendments to the approved budgets will be reported to the 225th General Assembly (2022).

Commissioners also voted to keep the apportionment rate flat for the next two years, at $8.98 per member.

**RACIAL INJUSTICE**

Commissioners passed a resolution entitled [“Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action.”](https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000727) Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, the Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association, and the Assembly Committee on Business Referral worked jointly on the motion that provides for the following:

* PC(USA) churches and presbyteries would approve antiracism policies.
* PC(USA) agencies are to review business items to be referred to the 225th General Assembly (2022) to ensure coverage under social witness policy.
* A response to the COVID-19 pandemic was approved, seeking compassion and justice for the most vulnerable for the disease, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) individuals as well as LGBTQ+ and persons with HIV.

An eight minute and 46 second silent vigil was held before the end of the assembly to acknowledge the time George Floyd was pinned at the neck by a Minneapolis police officer.

**COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REPORTS**

The 224th General Assembly (2020) voted that the work/reports by the [Moving Forward Implementation Commission](https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000654), the [Special Committee on Per Capita and Financial Sustainability](https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000590), and the report of the [Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force](https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000676), would be taken up by commissioners to the next assembly.